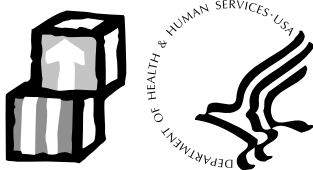


Building Blocks for Father Involvement

Building Block 5: Bringing a Fatherhood Plan to Life

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau

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Building Block 5:
Bringing A Fatherhood
Plan to Life

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The main thing to remember about work with fathers is to have fun. Create a fatherhood plan that is enjoyable for all.

Overview

Much has been accomplished in *Building Blocks 1-4*. A strong foundation has been laid to facilitate understanding of the significant role fathers play in healthy child development. These *Building Blocks* also identify reasons why fathers are likely to become involved in their child's early education, together with ways to encourage their involvement and to keep them involved. Questions have been asked and answered to ensure that program staff can anticipate and address the hurdles that may be encountered in work with fathers. Much has been learned and accomplished. Progress has been made.

The next step is to put the knowledge of *Building Blocks 1-4* into practice to bring a fatherhood involvement plan to life. This is where the fun begins: making a difference in the lives of the Head Start fathers and their children.

A child with a loving, involved mother and father is a child with an incredible "head start" in life! Always, that is the goal.

Fathers will have some of the same general needs mothers have in parenting their children, but they will have specific needs also.

Photos by D. Menzies, Rosemount Center HS; B. Blanken, Rosemount Center HS



Now the Fun Begins

All the study, planning, and organizational strategizing, though difficult, is essential to the task of building a successful father involvement program. Once accomplished, the real fun begins. It is now time to put into action all the thoughts and plans of the past weeks and months.

Working with fathers starts with meeting them and learning about their goals, their dreams, and their struggles with their children. Hopefully, these men will become an integral part of the fatherhood program and, as a result, a big part of center life. If the program succeeds, they will come to be, as well as to feel, involved.

Essential in work with fathers is to have FUN. Create a fatherhood plan that is enjoyable for all. If successful, the father involvement effort can be one of the most rewarding aspects of the center's program, bringing rich and long-lasting benefits to the Head Start children and their families.



What to Remember When Working With Fathers

Head Start staff members are well-trained and accustomed to building trusting relationships with families and their children. However, working with fathers may be less familiar. As observed in earlier *Building Blocks*, staff may need to change some of their notions and attitudes about fathers that stem from lack of or negative interactions with fathers in the past. Staff need to realize the deep extent to which fathers can make unique, positive contributions to their child's development because of the various ways fathers differ from mothers. All staff members should be aware, celebrate, and encourage these differences as potential resources for the children.

Fathers share some of the same general needs as mothers in parenting their children, but also have specific needs. Fathers first must understand the irreplaceable role they can play in the lives of their children and how they, as men, contribute good things to their children simply by virtue of being male parents. Such understanding will help fathers appreciate that a “pinch hitter” never can replace a father on the field. Fathers need to be in, and stay in, the game.

Specifically, fathers may need guidance to discipline their children in positive ways and to set reasonable, healthy, and age-appropriate goals. They may need help to control their tempers, as well as to understand the benefit of establishing paternity and the course to take to do so. Program staff might need to assist fathers in setting goals for their own lives and creating plans of action. Fathers also might need help in negotiating conflict with their child's mother and building a better, more cooperative relationship. These all are important tasks fathers can take on for the sake of their children.

When a man wants to share his problems, program staff need to recognize this for what it is. Such sharing means a father trusts and respects program staff, and that staff has reached a significant stage of progress. Celebrate this success and be sure to listen closely to the father. Possibly, all he needs is for someone to listen. As the father talks, appreciate his strengths and help him to recognize what he already is accomplishing in his situation, as well as how he can overcome the hurdles ahead. Help the father to recognize his achievements and build on his successes.



Photo by A. Kahanui, Rosemount Center HS

If couples show a desire to be together, it is critical to support the relationship with encouragement, advice, and education. And do not be afraid to talk about marriage!

Being Aware of the Mother/Father Relationship

Be aware of the relationship a father shares with his child's mother. Understand what makes this relationship strong, as well as any serious problems that might exist. In some very important ways, the relationship between a mother and father is the emotional foundation of the child's world. If this relationship is strong, the child has a solid emotional foundation. If this relationship is troubled, so will be the emotional stability of the child. Make sure to have program or community resources available to help fathers and mothers develop vital, healthy relationship skills. No one is born with relationship skills. They need to be learned. Fortunately, the number of relationship-building education resources available in communities continues to grow.

Helping fathers with relationship problems can be done either one-on-one or in peer group settings. Staff members may also be able to address some of these couple issues either at the center or during home visits.

If couples show a desire to be together, it is critical to support the relationship with encouragement, advice, and education. *And do not be afraid to talk about marriage!* It is important for staff to recognize and appreciate the value marriage can bring to the life of a child, as well as to the couple.

Four decades of social science research strongly and consistently indicates that, all things being equal, children with married parents do better in all measures of well-being than children in single-parent and cohabiting families. They benefit from elevated levels of physical and mental health, decreasing their need for medical or psychiatric care. Children with married parents perform better in school and have higher graduation rates. They are not as likely to be involved in violent behavior, premarital sex or childbearing, or substance abuse. They also are less likely to be victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse. Lastly, children with married parents almost never live in poverty, regardless of how poverty is defined. Married mothers and fathers also gain similar benefits compared to their unmarried peers. Marriage can be a wealth and health-building institution for both children and adults. Therefore, those who are concerned about the well-being of children and their parents should be concerned about marriage.¹

For parents who desire to build their relationship and home upon marriage, Head Start should offer the resources to help them achieve their goals.



Photo courtesy of HSNRC

Success will come only when the entire staff sees itself in the business of helping fathers. It cannot be merely a “tag-on” or “trophy project” of a few in the program.

Requirement #1: Full Staff Support

The fatherhood coordinator and family workers play a lead role in work with fathers, but they cannot make the fatherhood program a success by themselves. Success will come only when the entire staff sees itself in the business of helping fathers as part of the work in helping children. Fatherhood involvement work must be everyone’s work, from the director, to the transportation workers, to the receptionist.

This will happen as the Head Start director treats the fatherhood program as a priority and provides it with clear and regular support. The director must incorporate the fatherhood program, including all its activities and components, into the program’s overall plan. Fatherhood involvement work must become an integral part of the program’s mission. This may require a shift in thinking among staff about the center’s constituency and mission. Father involvement cannot be merely a “tag-on” or “trophy project” of a few in the program.

With the help of other managers, make sure that all front-line staff appreciate the mission change the fatherhood program requires. Go over, with everyone on staff, the document “Important Head Start Family Goals for All” (see page 3 of *Building Block 2*) and explain why these goals are important. Staff members need to hear from the director that they will be held accountable for how effectively they support the new mission of the program. Copy and post these goals prominently around the center. Make sure they stay in front of the eyes and mind of the staff.

Teachers, family care workers, and home visitors, of course, play a critical role because they are most often in close contact with parents. Include fathers in projects and meetings as a matter of routine. Make an effort to get to know the children’s fathers, learn about them, address them by name and in their native language, and keep the family workers and fatherhood coordinator informed.

Transportation workers—bus drivers and bus aides—are also an important contact point with fathers. For fathers who are shy about school settings, these workers can be a very comfortable contact point because they are not closely associated with the classroom. These workers can serve as strategic contact points and program recruiters. Train these staff to build rapport with both mother and father and to be able to tell them about relevant program services. They, too, can pass on helpful information they collect about fathers to the family workers and fatherhood coordinators.

Staff need to hear from the Director that they will be held accountable for how effectively they support the new mission of the program.

Photo by A. Kaahumui, Rosemount Center HS



The center's **receptionist**, like the transportation workers, plays a unique entry-point role for fathers. By phone and in person, the receptionist is usually the first point of contact for those interested in the program. In too many instances, this key staffer is not seen as a central player in the fatherhood mission. Do not make this mistake. Be sure the receptionist realizes the importance of the fatherhood program, the reasons for this new direction, and how he or she can contribute. The receptionist also must convey a father-friendly attitude, warmly recognizing fathers by name as they enter the center.

Again, the goal is for all agency staff to work as a team. If perceived as the pet project of only a few, most likely the program will fail.



Photo by W. C. Siegel, Honolulu Community Action Program, Inc. HS

Often, the ability to show openness to a different group is driven by competence with that group. Lack of openness can simply be the result of not being familiar with a different population group.

Enhancing Cultural Competence and Openness

Building Block 4 looked at how important it is to learn about fathers in the community. As staff learn about the diversity of fathers in the community, they also must bear in mind the principles of cultural competence and openness. Competence is knowledge of the various ethnic, cultural, and religious groups represented in the community. What is unique about them? What are their values? What helps or hinders them from achieving the goals the agency strives to reach? Competence in working with diverse groups can be gained by talking to the fathers themselves, as well as to the leaders in the community who work with fathers. These might include religious leaders, employers, community sports coordinators, and those in other community-based organizations.

Openness is the attitude toward these groups. Do they feel welcomed by staff? Do they sense that staff are comfortable around them? Often, openness to a different group is driven by competence with that group. Lack of openness can simply be the result of being unfamiliar with a different population group. The openness of center staff will likely grow as competence expands. There are three critical steps to gaining cultural competence:

- Seek knowledge of the different cultures represented in the community. Try to learn as much as possible about the characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of men from these various groups. Try to integrate many of these into the program, giving it a flavor and feel that is comfortable to fathers in the community.
- Work to transform cultural knowledge into cultural awareness. Try to understand the world from the point-of-view of fathers. (This is as important with gender as with cultural differences!)
- Develop and display cultural sensitivity. Acknowledge that cultural differences exist and seek ways to bridge them without erasing them. Make sure program materials are appropriate for diverse populations and that they foster good communication and education.

In the effort to seek cultural competence and openness, remember also that group identity is not everything. Each person is affected by group identity to varying degrees yet not defined by it. Fathers are individuals and desire to be recognized as such. A person may share many of the beliefs, attitudes, and attributes of a particular group or possess very few. Get to know the various groups represented in the community but, most importantly, get to know the fathers as individuals.

A fatherhood program has a “head start” on the evaluation process if, during the planning stage, measurable outcomes have been determined in the father needs assessment and program design has been based on these outcomes.

Make Evaluation Easy: Measure Success Step by Step

As noted in the planning process, a fatherhood program has a "head start" on the evaluation process if, during the planning stage, measurable outcomes have been determined in the father needs assessment (p. 4 of *Building Block 4*) and program design has been based on these outcomes. Such a beginning gives real, targeted outcomes to measure progress against.

As the program grows and achieves progress, chart this activity and show how the program is progressing toward its goals. What could the chart include?

- Keep lists of what has been learned about fathers in the community.
- Track and document staff training and development around father involvement.
- Document how the program reaches out to fathers and builds new relationships.
- List the special needs of fathers in the community. Explain the plan for helping to meet those needs.
- At the beginning of father groups, keep a log of each session, who attended, what the session covered, and the input gained from participating fathers.
- Make sure to help staff become sponges for even the smallest indicators of success with fathers, share these success stories at weekly staff meetings, and record them for evaluation.

By being forward thinking, successful evaluation—which is critical to the ongoing life of a program—will be much easier and provide much more useful results. Simply organize all the wonderful data the agency is in the habit of collecting and measure that against targeted outcomes.



Photo by B. Blanken, Rosemount Center HS

Regular, ongoing assessment serves the same function as the dials on the dashboard of your car. They give you constant feedback on the vital operations of your automobile so you can be sure you get where you want to go.

Plan for Constant Improvement

Under the Head Start Program Performance Standards, all programs must complete an annual self-assessment. Each agency needs to be sure that its plan is accomplishing the goals set for the program. It is a mistake to think of self-assessment as something to do once a year. Effective programs assess themselves constantly to gauge whether they are on track with their goals.

The “dot.com” business culture has developed a phrase—“the agile company”—to describe an organization that constantly monitors its ability to succeed and is able to make changes quickly to ensure success. Be one of these organizations that makes needed adjustments fast. Some might involve major changes. Most will be minor adjustments. Important to remember is that the need to make adjustments to a plan throughout the year is not an indication of poor planning. Rather, this is a sign of sensitivity to the needs and interests of all families and assurance that nothing—even the original plan—interferes with successfully meeting their needs. In sum: This is just plain smart!

Here are some approaches that have been used to incorporate ongoing monitoring of both the program plan and its implementation:

- Conduct quarterly audits to ensure that data on fathers are routinely collected and analyzed.
- Create and use brief, easy-to-use forms to gather feedback from participants on services, speakers, training, and other program activities.
- At the end of meetings and activities, informally ask participants how they liked the experience and how it could be improved. After receiving their feedback, record their comments and then discuss how to incorporate this information.
- With individual families, review the partnership on a quarterly basis to make sure their goals are being met. Record their progress and agreements on ways to improve problem areas.



Photo by C. Dyer, Higher Horizons HS

The “dot.com” business culture has developed a phrase—“the agile company”—to describe an organization that constantly monitors its ability to succeed and is able to make changes quickly to ensure success. Be one of these organizations that makes needed adjustments fast.

- Review results from automated systems, such as the Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System (see page 22 of *Building Block 4*), on a regular basis to ensure that outcomes are linked to effective program activities.
- Invite members of the center’s governing body and Policy Council or Committee to join the Program Assessment Team.

In conducting ongoing monitoring and assessment, it is critical to assign one staff member to the task of maintaining this assessment and reporting. This person must possess a sense of ownership of the program and appreciate the importance of ongoing assessment. Regular, ongoing assessment serves the same function as the dials on a car dashboard, which give constant feedback on the vital operations of the automobile to ensure arrival at the driver’s destination. Ignoring them could create big problems. It is this vital task of monitoring the center’s “dashboard” that assures a program will arrive at its desired destination.

A centerpiece of father involvement work is father discussion groups. Here fathers come together to interact with their peers, to develop trust, to build relationships, and to share openly and learn from one another.

Photo courtesy of HSNRC



Conducting Successful Father Peer/Discussion Groups

A centerpiece of father involvement work is father discussion groups. Here fathers come together to interact with their peers, to develop trust, to build relationships, and to begin to share openly and learn from one another.

There are many ways to conduct these groups. Most fatherhood programs offer fathers a parenting discussion group, a peer support group, or some combination of the two. Groups may be open-ended and ongoing or choose to set a very definite agenda each week. Some are more free-flowing in style, responding to what fathers want to discuss. Typically, groups work best with some well-thought-out direction and structure, especially in the first few months of formation. Whether a group considers it important to set clear group rules and guidelines or to deal with issues as they arise, the wise approach for all father discussion groups is to anticipate and address some issues from the outset.

From the start, be clear about the purpose of the group activity and the goals to be accomplished. Identify expected outcomes. Plan ahead, and think carefully and creatively about how to accomplish the group's goals.

Make sure to hold father groups at a place that:

- Meets the real, practical needs of fathers;
- Makes fathers feel welcome; and
- Ensures that everyone feels comfortable about participating.

Several resources exist to facilitate developing content and process for fathers' groups. The *21st Century Exploring Parenting* program, developed specifically for Head Start parents, includes a Group Leader's Guide. (*21st Century Exploring Parenting* can be obtained by contacting the Head Start Information Publication Center at www.headstartinfo.org.) Section 3 of *21st Century Exploring Parenting* includes excerpts from several other curricula, which may prove helpful.



Photo by A. Kahanui, Rosemount Center HS

Running a successful group may look easy but is truly a specialized skill. Program staff need training before setting out.

However, the best curricula in the world are not sufficient. What is essential is knowing how to lead an interesting and engaging discussion group that can set and achieve its goals and thus be successful. Many groups fail because the leader lacks the necessary skills. Some of the most common problems include:

- Lack of preparation or purpose;
- Lack of understanding of the needs of the group;
- Excessive lecturing;
- Inadequate direction (the group ends up being only a “rap session”); and
- Inability to tame overactive participants and comfortably involve the quieter participants.

Facilitating a successful group may look easy but is truly a specialized skill. Program staff need training before setting out. A local book store or public library will have some helpful resources on how to lead successful small groups. Check these out and determine which books might best suit both the level of staff experience and particular group needs.



Photo by A. Kahanui, Rosemount Center HS

What words best describe your child? What is your child's favorite book?

Ideas for Building Child-Awareness in Fathers

How well do fathers know their children? It is important that fathers find ways to connect with their child in meaningful ways. This builds sensitivity in the father, builds confidence in the child, and brings father and child closer together. It will also pay life-long dividends for both father and child. What adult child doesn't remember and cherish her father striving to understand who she is? What adult child doesn't harbor painful feelings because his father did not seek to understand who he is? It is thus very important to foster positive father-child relationships.

Here are a few questions fathers can consider about their children to learn about who they really are:

What words best describe your child?

What are your child's most prized possessions?

Who are your child's closest friends/best playmates?

What causes your child the greatest stress? Greatest fear?

What adult child doesn't remember and cherish her father striving to understand who she is? What adult child doesn't harbor painful feelings because her father did not seek to understand who she is?

Photo by T.D. Summers, Child-Adult Resource Services HS



How does your child express happiness? Anger? Affection? Frustration?

What do you enjoy doing the most with your child?

What is your child's favorite food?

What is your child's least favorite food?

What would your child like to do when she or he grows up?



Photo by D. Mentzer, Rosemount Center HS

What was your child's most disappointing experience in the past year? What is something that really upsets your child?

If your child could spend a whole day with you doing whatever he or she wanted, what would that day look like?

What are your child's favorite activities?

What is something that really upsets your child?

What is your child's favorite book?

What is your child's favorite animal, color, sport, video, toy? Why is this a favorite?

If your child could spend a whole day with you doing whatever he or she wanted, what would that day look like?

Photos by D. Mentzer, Rosemount Center HS; D. Mentzer, NRC; C. Johnson



What is the most important thing you need to sit down and discuss with your child in the next six months?

What does your child think about God or the Divine?

What does your child think is greatest about Daddy?

Adapted from the National Center on Fathering



Age-Appropriate Father-Child Activities

Another primary staple of a successful fatherhood program will be creative father-child activities. What are some effective ways to involve fathers with their children?

Be sure to schedule father-child activities on a regular basis. The best investment is time spent thinking of creative, interesting things fathers can do with their child. Father-child lunches or dinners, especially those with themes, are a good start. But much is needed. Arrange situations and interactions where fathers can help their children enjoy new experiences and develop new skills. The fact that their fathers were there when they experienced these new activities will stay in each child's mind for a lifetime.

Below are some ideas that can be incorporated into a father involvement program, divided by age-appropriateness.

Activities fathers can do with infants and toddlers:

- Babies love to be held close to their father's chest. Holding a baby close and rocking her helps the baby to feel secure. Develop experiences that are physical.
- Babies also love to be lifted and gently tickled by daddy. It can be thrilling for them and they also learn, as daddy holds them safely, that daddy is there to take care of them. They learn trust and security.
- Talk to your baby. Father's voice is different from mother's voice, and children can detect the difference from the earliest weeks. They learn to trust you by hearing your voice. Name objects that you and your child encounter. This helps your child learn the connection between names and objects. Develop experiences that are verbal.
- Sing favorite songs to your child. Your baby loves to hear familiar songs over and over again. Make up your own special songs. (Teach fathers good, creative songs and how they can make up their own that are special to their child.) Young children enjoy songs with motions and finger-plays.
- Babies are fascinated by faces. Make sure that yours is very expressive when you interact with your child. Let them touch your face as you make funny faces. Create activities that involve real "face-to-face" interaction.



Photo by D. Mentzer, Rosemount Center HS

Ask your child about things they would like to learn and then make plans to learn them together.

- Say “I love you” often! Let your child, from earliest days, know why she or he is special to you. Encourage dads to never stop doing this. Create activities that help you find ways to say “I love you,” realizing that the best way is just to say it. Don’t be like the man who explained to his wife after she complained he never says “I love you,” “For goodness sakes, I told you I loved you 20 years ago...and I’ll let you know if that ever changes!”
- Babies love to watch you and mimic what you are doing. Get down on the floor with them and do some funny movements. Encourage them to copy you.
- Talk to your baby as you go outside for walks. Point to things and name them. Talk about what you see in your neighborhood. (Give fathers creative ideas for doing this...and the opportunity!)
- Let your child see you interacting with other children and adults. This builds confidence in interacting with others.
- Read! One of the most important things you can do with your child, even the day you bring her home from the hospital, is to read to her. Put your child in your lap and cuddle her. Choose simple hard-board books with bright pictures. Point out objects and name them. Tell what is happening in the story. You are teaching your little newborn in this exercise that reading books can be a great way of being close with daddy. You are also getting him or her comfortable with books. Children will learn instinctively that books are a very good part of their lives. As your child gets closer to one year of age, she or he will start developing language skills, and reading is one of the best ways to promote this. (Make sure the program incorporates father/child book time.)
- Reading to, cuddling, and talking to your child are three of the most important activities to do with your infant and toddler to stimulate healthy development.

Activities fathers can do with two-to-three-year-olds:

- Provide a safe place where your child can play and run. Take your child outside as much as possible to run in the yard or park. Encourage her or him to jump, climb and roll down hills in ways appropriate for his or her age. Encourage children to push limits, BUT in healthy, reasonable ways. This builds confidence and good judgment in taking reasonable risks in life. (Incorporate this kind of outside, physical play in the program.)



Photo by D. Mentzer, Rosemount Center HS

Teach your child that being kind, gracious, and honest are some of the most important things in the world. Let her know what you expect and why.

- Read to your child everyday. Read books, magazines, signs you see on the street. Help your child learn that reading is a normal and natural part of life. Even fathers who are not strong readers can make up stories to go along with pictures. The important experiences are closeness, hearing language, and seeing that words correspond to pictures and make a story.
- Play ball with your child. Teach him or her to catch, throw and kick a ball in age-appropriate ways. This teaches coordination, and it's fun to play with dad. This can be worked into organized outside play time.
- Help your child learn to use the potty. Help her or him understand that everyone makes mistakes when they are potty training. Never punish a child for an accident. (Helping fathers be better helpers in this area can be done in small group sessions.)
- Continue saying "I love you." (Find creative ways to help fathers understand why they are special.)
- Encourage your child to ask questions. Answer them with short, simple answers. Father/child groups can encourage such questioning interaction.
- Teach your child what words are acceptable and which are not, when they are heard.
- Teach your child that being kind, gracious, and honest are some of the most important things in the world. Let children know what you expect and why. Let children know what they should strive to live up to. (A father peer group is a good place to stimulate thinking about proper expectations for children. Give fathers an opportunity to communicate these expectations to their children.)
- Create small, silly or fun secrets with your child. Have a special place that just you two like, and no one else knows about. Share a secret handshake or joke. This private sharing builds a strong bond between father and child and makes the child feel special and important.
- Participate in the child's favorite activities, whether it is splashing in puddles, drawing with crayons, playing dress-up, or examining bugs on the ground.

Activities fathers can do with four-year-olds and older:

- During meals, ask your child the best thing about their day. Answer the question yourself in return.
- Keep going for walks and throwing balls together.
- Meet and be interested in your child's friends.

Say “I love you” often! Let your child, from earliest days, know why he is special to you. Keep this up until...

Photo by W. C. Siegel, Honolulu Community Action Program, Inc. HS



- Really watch your child as he or she plays. Help fathers learn how to give encouragement and compliments on how well the child does.
- Ask your child about things he or she would like to learn and then make plans to learn them together.
- Teach your son and daughter how to do “man jobs,” for example, fixing the car or hammering.
- Make regular visits to the library and to discuss favorite books. (Help father and child know how empowering it feels to have a library card.)
- Let your child see you enjoying books or magazines.
- Talk to your child about goals and dreams. (Let fathers talk about their own goals to their children.)
- Initiate discussions with children about what they want to do when they grow up and visit appropriate workplaces.
- Listen to your child’s favorite music. Help children develop a taste for and understanding of many different kinds of music.
- Do activities where you can laugh together.
- Tell your child stories about when you were little. Let children know about mistakes you made and things you did right!
- Help build your child’s imagination and language by making up creative stories with them. Start a story and let children add in key parts: “The horses were all the color of _____ and the best part is they could all _____ whenever they wanted. And after the horses left the magic mountain, they all started to _____, which really made everyone laugh!”

Be creative in developing activities that fathers can do with their children. Help fathers understand that these things can be done at home, while driving, or anywhere. Encourage fathers to come up with ideas and activities of their own.

Encourage fathers to get involved in their child’s everyday routines, such as bathing, dressing, eating, and taking a nap. Often, these are opportunities for intimate, close interactions that include a lot of physical nurturing and verbal exchange.

Everyday life for a child is
a story.

-a Head Start parent

Photo by W. C. Seigel, Kentucky HS



Staying Connected: Helping Parents Keep Family Stories Alive

Family stories are a very important way to help children understand where they came from, who their people are and who *they* are. Family stories connect children to a larger reality, a larger story, and give meaning to their lives.

When parents and children spend time together, they are creating stories, and stories create connections. This often happens without notice. Parents share and create stories by talking, answering questions, and living lives that are closely watched by their children. Children share by talking, asking questions, and play-acting what they see around them.

Included in *21st Century Exploring Parenting* is “Our Stories Keep Us Connected,” a creative program that gives families ideas for connecting with each other through their common stories and experiences. Fathers can play a key role in shaping and passing on these family stories. “Our Stories Keep Us Connected” consists of a Parent Guide and instructional video. For additional information on “Our Stories Keep Us Connected,” contact:

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Head Start Bureau
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Photo by W. C. Siegel, Kentucky HS

As has been pointed out many times in these pages, one of the most important things a father can do with his child is read.

Great Books for Fathers to Share with Their Children

As has been pointed out many times in these pages, one of the most important things a father can do with his child is read. This is a great time to be physically close. A father can be creative in his story telling, making the story interesting with his voice and facial expressions. This is a good way for the child to learn that books can be fun because they have interesting stories and pictures. Children also learn that reading is for both boys and girls, and they become comfortable with books. Books become an important part of their lives. Without knowing it, they also expand their vocabulary and knowledge.

Strongly encourage dads to have a regular book reading time at bedtime, right after dinner...anytime! You can also pick times here and there to read. Encourage mother and father to keep books all around the house and in the car so they can read if stuck waiting while on an errand or at the doctor's office. Anytime is right for the joy of sharing a book or a story. Even parents less comfortable with their own reading skills can share reading time with their children, looking at pictures and making up a story.

Help dads become regulars at the local library. Encourage them to ask the librarian to help them find any of the books listed below. They can also go to the children's section and pull particularly interesting books right off the shelf. There are many good children's books that can be shared together. The following is a list of some of the books that feature fathers and children.

The Summer My Father Was Ten, by Pat Brisson. A father tells his daughter the story of how he damaged a neighbor's tomato garden when he was a boy, and what he did to make the situation right with old Mr. Bellavista.

If I Were Your Father, by Margaret Park-Bridges. Warm and humorous conversations between a boy and his father. The boy offers his fantastic wisdom of what a father might do.

Born in the Gravy, by Denys Cazet. A young Chicana tells her father all the things she did on her first day of kindergarten.



Photo by K. Wilson, Bay County EHS, NEMCSA

Read! One of the most important things you can do with your child, even the day you bring her home from the hospital, is to read to her. Put your child in your lap and cuddle. Choose simple hard-board books with bright pictures. Point out objects and name them.

Room for Stepdaddy, by Jean Thor Cook. Joey has trouble accepting his new stepfather but the constant love of his father, mother, and stepfather finally convince him that his stepdaddy can love him too.

Night Driving, by John Coy. As father and son drive in the night, they watch the sunset, talk about baseball, sing cowboy songs, and change a flat tire before pitching camp at daybreak.

Papa Lucky's Shadow, by Niki Daly. With his granddaughter's help, Papa Lucky takes his love of dancing onto the street and makes some extra money.

I'll See You When the Moon is Full, by Susi Gregg Fowler. Abe will miss his father when he takes off on a business trip but is reassured of his return in two weeks when the crescent moon is full.

The Father Who Had Ten Children, by Benedicte Guettier. A loving story of a dad caring for his ten children, Even when he takes time for himself, dad still misses his children, shortens his trip, and comes back home to them.

Dad's Dinosaur Day, by Diane Dawson Hearn. Sometimes even dad needs a break, any break!

Father's Rubber Shoe, by Yumi Heo. Yungsu misses Korea terribly until he begins to make friends in America.

Papa Tell Chita a Story, by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard. An African American girl shares time with her father as he tells her about when he was a soldier in Cuba during the Spanish American War.

Me, Dad and Number 6, by Dana Andrew Jennings. A father, his friends and his six-year-old son rebuild an old car together and drive it in a race.

Your Dad was Just Like You, by Dolores Johnson. While visiting his grandfather, an African American boy hears a story about his father's childhood that helps him understand his father.

Finding a Job for Daddy, by Evelyn Maslac. A young girl helps her father look for a new job and lets him know that he will always have the important job of being her daddy.

Strongly encourage dads to have a regular book reading time at bedtime, right after dinner... anytime!

Photo by J. Jerold



Guess How Much I Love You, by Sam McBratney. Baby Nutbrown Hare wants to show his daddy how much he loves him—but love as big as this is too hard to measure. They have fun trying.

Daddy Will You Miss Me?, by Wendy McCormick. When a daddy must leave on a trip, a father and son help ease the pain of separation by creating rituals for each passing day. These simple activities will help them remain close in their hearts while apart.

Just Me and My Dad, by Mercer Meyer. Lil' Critters camping trip with his Dad shows his attempts to be bigger than his Dad. Illustrations show otherwise.

Love You Forever, by Robert Munsch. A little boy goes through the stages of childhood and becomes a man. Through each stage, his mother takes very good care of him. In the end, he must reverse the care and provide nurturing for his aging mother. An incredible story of enduring love that is guaranteed to make all of the family shed a tear.

My Daddy, by Susan Paradis. The bond between a boy and his father is profound. Exploring it from the point of view of a child, the wealth of feelings evoked by every-day events is depicted in simple words.

I Love My Daddy Because..., by Laurel Porter-Gaylord. Clever text borrows simple phrases from a child's experience with her daddy to show that animal daddies take care of their young, too.

Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti, by Anna Grossnickle Hines. A fun book about doing household tasks with daddy.

Kevin and His Dad, by Irene Smalls. A young boy spends a whole day with his dad. This lovely picture book celebrates the excitement, pride, love, and pleasure a boy can experience with a father who includes him in both work and play.

In Daddy's Arms I am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers. A collection of poems celebrating African American fathers by Angela Johnson, E. Ethelbert Mille, Carole Boston Weatherford and others.



Encourage mother and father to keep books all around the house and in the car so they can read if stuck waiting while on an errand or at the doctor's office. Anytime is right for the joy of sharing a book or a story.

Daddy and Me, by Catherine Daly Weir. Actual photos of dads and their children involved in daily fun.

Daddies are for Catching Fireflies, by Harriet Ziefert. This inexpensive, flap book shows the delightful ways of daddies.

Adapted from a listing compiled by FatherNet



Photo by D. Mentzer, Rosemont Center HS

These activity books can be a great way to stimulate a wealth of rich interaction between father and child...and they are so easy to create.

Building a Father and Child Activity Book

In the Appendix of *Building Block 5*, there is an example of an *Activity Book* that gives ideas for creative and fun things fathers can do with their children. The *Activity Book* was developed by Audubon Area Head Start Family and Community Services in Owensboro, Kentucky. Feel free to duplicate this book or to use it as an idea stimulator to create one. Try to incorporate some activities that might help father and child creatively work through some of the problems present in the community and in their relationship...without even realizing they are doing so.

These activity books, such fun and so easy to create, can be a great way to stimulate a wealth of rich interaction between father and child. Once complete, an activity book becomes a treasure for children to keep through the years.



Photo by W. C. Siegel, Honolulu Community Action Program, Inc. HS

Be very proud of all the good study, careful planning, and hard work to involve fathers in the lives of their children. This contribution makes a great difference in the lives of both children and their parents.

Conclusion

All the good study, careful planning, and hard work toward implementation concludes now. Be very proud of what has been accomplished: all that has been learned and the progress made. Remind staff and parents that father involvement provides a wealth of wonderful treasures that will stay with children, their parents, and program staff for years to come. This critically important work pays rich dividends in deeply changed lives.

*A child with a loving, involved mother and father is a child that has significant advantages.
Head Start father involvement work helps to give children a big head start in life.*

Endnotes

¹ Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Glenn T. Stanton, *Why Marriage Matters* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997).

Appendix 5

See following page for sample *Father and Child Activity Book*.

